

How to do Scriptural Reasoning

Guidelines for Scriptural Reasoning discussions

Here are some ground rules to keep in mind, which can help the Scriptural Reasoning discussion work well:

1. The first and most important ground rule is to stick to the texts.

It is our experience that these discussions are much more fruitful if the discussion remains focused on the scriptural texts and on the ways in which they can be read - rather than spiralling off to become a general discussion of Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Be prepared to answer the question, 'Where do you see that in the text?' If you draw from sources other than the passage in question, you should be able to connect them to that particular text.

2. The second ground rule is give space to others' readings.

Even if you have very firm, clear and well-formed ideas about how a particular text should be read (perhaps it is just obvious to you what this text means, or you know other scriptural texts that help interpret this one, or you know authoritative commentaries on the text from your tradition) don't simply impose that reading on the group. The discussion will work best if the other participants are able to hear about the way you believe the text should be read whilst exploring the text, and other possible ways of reading it, for themselves. That may sometimes mean that you have to sit back for a while, and let a discussion continue that you believe to be mistaken - before finding a way gently to explain to people how and why you read the text the way you do.

3. The third ground rule is be playful.

This is not an instruction to be frivolous or trivial, or to show disrespect to the group or to the texts. It is simply that we have found that discussions work best when the participants feel able to make suggestions about how to read the text, even if they are newcomers to it, and don't yet know whether their suggestions really make sense. And discussions work best when the participants feel able to ask questions, even if they suspect that the answers might be obvious to other members of the group.

4. The fourth ground rule is be honest

You are not expected to be an 'expert' on your own Scriptures and faith tradition, so be honest about the things you don't know or understand. You may not agree with other people's interpretations and it is OK to say so - respectfully. Avoid too much generalisation - it is better to say, 'As a Christian I think this text means ...' than 'Christians believe ...'.

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How might a Scriptural Reasoning discussion work?

Questions of clarification

There's no fixed format or recipe, but a discussion might start off with simple questions for clarification:

- What does this word mean?
- Is this text part of a longer narrative?
- Who is speaking in this verse?

How participants read their own texts

The discussion might then begin to move on to questions about how Jewish, Christian and Muslims read their respective texts:

- So, would you normally read this text as a promise?
- How were you taught that this command should be put into practice?
- What sort of things have you heard preachers say about this text?
- Does this text really get used at marriage ceremonies?

As the participants get into the rhythm of their discussion, the questions might begin to change to be more probing:

- Couldn't you read it this way?
- What if you take this not as a promise but as a threat?
- Would it mean something different if you assumed it was addressed to someone who was already a believer?

Remember, Scriptural Reasoning is meant to be an enjoyable experience, not an ordeal. It is designed to encourage dialogue between members of different faith traditions and nothing that's said in a discussion is 'cast in stone'. So relax and enjoy it!

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